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## Building myths, burying mistakes

by Steve Perry

On November 25, 1963, three days after John Kennedy's assassination and a day after Lee Harvey Oswald's murder, acting attorney general Nicholas Katzenbach sat down to draft a memo for Lyndon Johnson. The investigation had scarcely begun, but on that Monday morning when it was clear that the case would never go to trial, Katzenbach wrote to Johnson aide Bill Moyers: "The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial."

That document is one of many thousands in the files of Harold Weisberg, a former reporter and Senate investigator whom *Esquire* has called "the dean of assassination researchers." In Weisberg's view, the Katzenbach memo became the blueprint for official policy: Make the assassination look like the work of an unstable loner to forestall embarrassing questions about why intelligence agencies failed to uncover a plot. Working out of his home in Frederick, Maryland, the 78-year-old Weisberg has written several books on the case and amassed more than a quarter-million pages of previously secret files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. Hardly anyone ever comes to look at what he's got. "The people who write conspiracy theories aren't interested," he says. "They're only interested in what they can torture into seeming to support preconceptions of their own invention. For the most part these records have not been looked at. And I make them available to everybody. The most recent and egregious case is that of Oliver Stone."

It was Weisberg who started the avalanche of bad pre-release publicity for Stone's *JFK*, which is set to open the week before Christmas. When he heard that Stone planned to base his movie on a book by former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison—a man whose rambling investigation of the Kennedy case led him to speculate about conspiracies

involving (pick two or three) Russians, Cuban exiles, the CIA, neo-Nazis, the Dallas police, the U.S. military, and a homosexual ring—Weisberg got a bootlegged copy of the script and dispatched it to Washington Post reporter George Lardner. A story lambasting the project followed, and it proved the first of many. I reached Weisberg on the phone last week for an hour-long talk on Kennedy, Stone, and the dim prospects for our ever knowing any more than we know now.

*City Pages:* There have been a number of new books on the assassination over the past 10 or 15 years, theorizing various conspiracies. Are any of them worthwhile?

Weisberg: There hasn't been a book that I can remember that hasn't been flawed. The

reason is very simple. The government never investigated the case, and never intended to. That may seem impossible to believe, but that gets to some of the main records I got under the Freedom of Information Act. With the crime not actually investigated, private investigators have nothing on which to proceed. We don't have any real leads. There are too many theories that *might* be reasonable, and you can't begin to eliminate from them. It is and in all probability will remain an unsolved crime.

*In the 1960s you played a role in trying to convince Jim Garrison his investigation was on the wrong track. Could you tell me about your dealings with him, and when you knew he was off-base?*

It was right after the election in 1968. I was in Dallas, and he insisted I come back to New Orleans. While I was there, I found out he was going to mark the fifth anniversary of the assassination by charging two people with being grassy knoll assassins. One was Edgar Eugene Bradley, who was then the West Coast representative of the right-wing New Jersey preacher Carl McIntire, and the other was a man named Robert Perrin. Well, I knew Perrin had killed himself in '62.

Garrison's staff had tried to talk him out of this, and they couldn't. And they asked me to do the work that would make it impossible for him to proceed. Among the things we found were the morgue book that showed the day in 1962 when Perrin died, and the hospital records that show his admission after taking poison. I put together an investigative report that said [Garrison investigator] Bill Boxley was going out and feeding back to Garrison what Garrison wanted—what Garrison himself had made up. Garrison wasn't

going to fire himself, so he fired Boxley. And in firing him, he said that Boxley had been infiltrated onto the staff by the CIA to wreck the investigation. Well, nobody infiltrated Boxley. Everybody on the staff had objected to him, and Garrison hired him anyway.

*Do you think Garrison's investigation was onto anything of merit?*

No. He made it all up as he went. And he never proved what he made up because he couldn't. I can't remember a single thing that is factual and has any relevance that he brought to light.

*You've objected to the way Oliver Stone went about putting together and promoting his movie.*

Stone has been propagandizing, saying that all of the evidence is withheld at least until 2039, and some of it may be withheld longer. What about the quarter-million pages I have? And others have more. Mark Allen, for example, has continued along the same lines I have with the same lawyer I used, and he's gotten a lot of information. Some of it pretty significant. But nobody gives a damn. They want theories only. Conspiracy sells, and that's all they care about.

At the same time that Oliver says these records are being suppressed, he knows damn well I have them and that I make them available to everybody. Including him. Yet he says everything is suppressed by the government, particularly the CIA. If he says that, how can you trust anything he says? And frankly I don't. Except one. He said he was scared to The New York Times, and he ought to be.

*Is there any way to generalize about what Weisberg to page 14*

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Harold Weisberg, "the dean of assassination researchers," says we'll never know who conspired to kill Kennedy because the government never wanted to know.

*Weisberg from page 11*  
you've found in that quarter-million pages of material?

It's very simple. The government knew beyond question that there had been a conspiracy, and it lied. The government's own records disclose that it was a crime beyond the capabilities of any one man. There are other factors—for instance, that Oswald's rifle didn't have the capability of firing that many shots within the time period. This alone is enough to tell you they knew better. But they lied. You could understand that for the first few days, when people in Washington on a higher level had to be concerned with whether there were gonna be other evil events—was there going to be an effort to overthrow the government, from within or without? Were they going to try to assassinate any other people? But once it became clear that wasn't going to happen, there's no excuse for the government's dishonesty.

*Does the coverup lead you to believe that elements in government were involved in a conspiracy, or just that they wanted to cover up their failure to detect it in advance?*

I think it's the latter entirely. Some people believe there are three parts to a conspiracy and they're all one: You first have the conception, then you have the execution, then you have the coverup. But coverup is the way a bureaucracy works. It doesn't have to have any connection with the crime itself. And from what I know, it has no connection.

*There are a couple of lines of popular speculation I wanted to ask you about. Has the paperwork you've uncovered documented any of the alleged connections between Jack Ruby and Oswald?*

No, and there's no reason to believe there was any.

*Did the Ruby file suggest to you any connections between Ruby and other potential parties to a plot?*

No. Nor is there any real reason to think that Ruby was connected in any way at all to the mafia except on his own efforts. Nobody would have trusted Ruby with anything. He was sick in the head. You couldn't

print some of the things that were true.

*Do you think the material you have holds any clues about who else was involved?*

No. They didn't want that information, so if they heard of it they didn't use it. Let me give you an example. This is one of the records that was secret until I obtained it. There was an engineer named Bronson in Dallas who had both a Leica and a very good quality 8mm camera with him. He called the Dallas office of Eastman-Kodak and he called the FBI on Monday morning, three days after the crime. An agent named Newsom went there and came back and filed a report. He said the pictures didn't show the building where the shots were fired. Actually there were 87 different pictures of that one window. He said one picture did show

the car at the precise time the president was killed, but they couldn't use it for identification purposes. Translation: Nothing he had showed Oswald with a smoking gun. The still pictures showed the president being killed, and showed the positions of all the occupants of the car, and it showed a lot of people in the background—people who were witnesses. So what does it say about the FBI when they dismiss these pictures?

*Do you have any hunches about what happened that you'd be willing to voice publicly?*

I'll tell you in general terms only—that people who wanted to change policy are responsible for it. Back in 1966, when I wrote the epilogue to my second book, I thought we might approach this like lawyers: Qui bono? But before too long I realized that wasn't true. There were just too many people who could have seen benefit for themselves. The only thing you can use that line of thinking for is perhaps to eliminate some people.

Those who talk about the crime being committed by some group that could benefit have no basis for picking out that group and eliminating the others. They can say it's reasonable, but they can't say it's proven. To tell the people it is proven is to deceive the people. That's what I think Oliver Stone is doing.

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